Pacific Bird Observer

NEWSLETTER OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN BIOLOGICAL SURVEY PROGRAM, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

March 1966 No. 4

MISSIONARY REPORTS UNUSUAL FLIGHT OF BLUE-GRAY NODDY

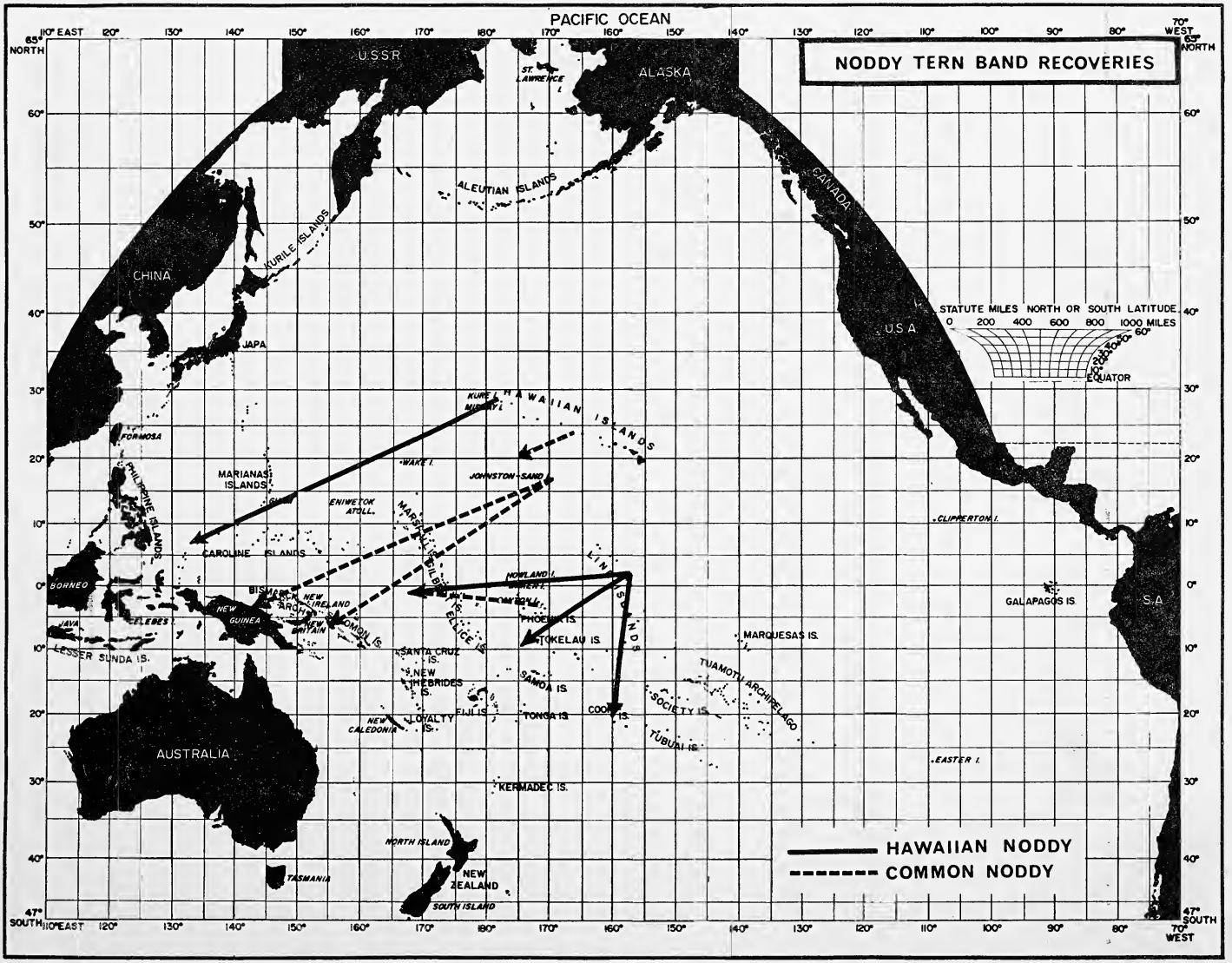
The Pacific Program recently received a letter from C. Scarborough, District Missionary in the Gilbert Islands, in which he reported capturing a bird with one of our bands on Onotoa, Gilbert Islands, November 14, 1965. When we checked our banding records we discovered that the bird was a Blue-gray Noddy, a small tern about eleven inches long, which had been banded the preceding September on McKean Island in the Phoenix group. This noddy had travelled about 630 miles to the west across the open ocean!

Smithsonian personnel only very rarely have seen Blue-gray Noddies more than a few miles from their breeding areas and, although we had banded almost 1800 of these terns in the Leeward, Line, and Phoenix Islands, we had never obtained any record of interisland movement. We were thus immensely pleased to receive Scarborough's communication that gave our first record of long distance oceanic flight in this poorly known species.

Missionary Scarborough also reported that the tern had arrived at Onotoa accompanied by heavy rain and strong westerly winds which perhaps explains how this rather weak flying bird, compared with other terns, reached the island. The noddy was in excellent condition and when Scarborough released it, the bird flew away towards the south.

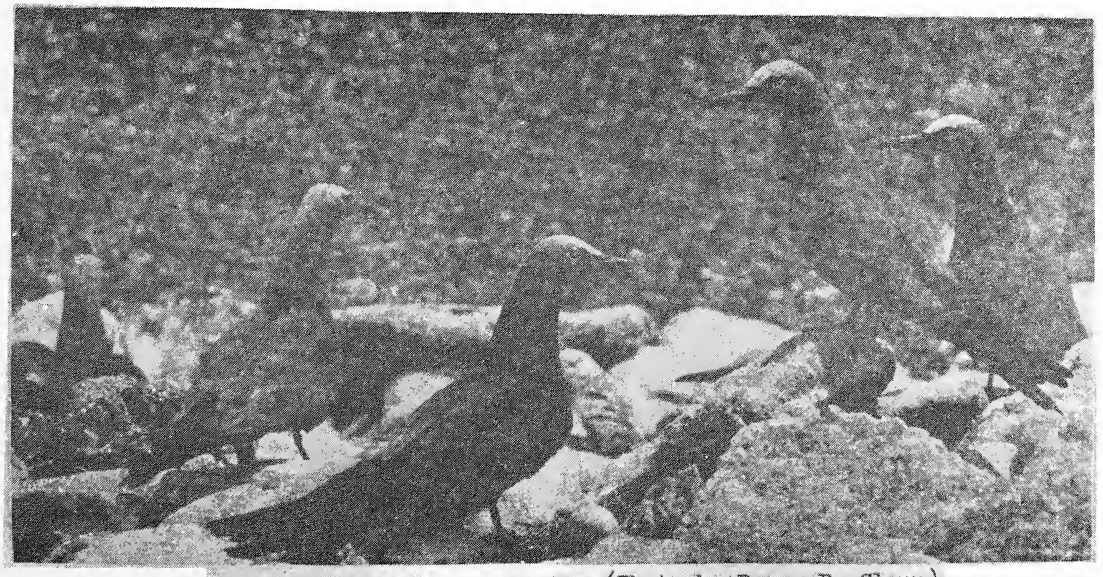
These noddies breed on several islands in the Central Pacific, among them McKean Island in the Phoenix group, Christmas Island in the Line group, and Necker Island in the Hawaiian Leeward Islands. On these islands they make no nest but lay their single spotted egg directly on the ground, usually in rocky depressions in the coral rubble or under projecting coral ledges. When disturbed at the nest they arise in dove-like fluttery flight but are very silent, seldom uttering more than a few call notes. On islands which have not been frequently visited the Blue-gray Noddies are amazingly tame and fly within inches of the observer's head. At such times they are easily caught with a butterfly net or even by hand but after a few days they grow wary and fly about just beyond reach.

-Roger B. Clapp


PACIFIC OCEAN
NODDY TERN BAND RECOVERIES
U.S.S.R.
ALASKA
CANADA
U.S.A.
CHINA
JAPA
KURILE ISLANDS
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
ST. LAWRENCE I.
KURE I.
MIDWAY I.
HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
FORMOSA
PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
MARIANAS ISLANDS
GUAM
WAKE I.
JOHNSTON SAND
ENIWETOK ATOLL
MARSHALL ISLANDS
CAROLINE ISLANDS
BORNEO
CELEBES
JAVA
LESSER SUNDA IS.
BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO
NEW IRELAND
NEW BRITAIN
NEW GUINEA
SOLOMON IS.
HOWLAND I.
BAKER I.
PHOENIX IS.
ELLICE IS.
TOKELAU IS.
LINE ISLANDS
SANTA CRUZ IS.
NEW HEBRIDES IS.
SAMOA IS.
FIJI IS.
TONGA IS.
COOK IS.
NEW CALEDONIA
LOYALTY IS.
MARQUESAS IS.
TUAMOTU ARCHIPELAGO
SOCIETY IS.
TUBUAI IS.
CLIPPERTON I.
GALAPAGOS IS.
EASTER I.
S.A.
AUSTRALIA
KERMADEC IS.
NORTH ISLAND
NEW ZEALAND
SOUTH ISLAND
TASMANIA
STATUTE MILES NORTH OR SOUTH LATITUDE
0 200 400 600 800 1000 MILES
EQUATOR
HAWAIIAN NODDY
COMMON NODDY
110° EAST 120° 130° 140° 150° 160° 170° 180° 170° 160° 150° 140° 130° 120° 110° 100° 90° 80° 70° WEST
65° NORTH
60° 50° 40° 30° 20° 10° 0° 10° 20° 30° 40°
47° SOUTH

NODDY TERN BAND REPORTERS

	NAME OF REPORTER	PLACE BIRD WAS FOUND	PLACE BIRD WAS BANDED
HAWAIIN NODDY TERN	The Rev. Toka Tarapu	Pukapuka, Cook Islands	Cook Island, Christmas Atoll
	Telernatura L.	Ocean Island	Cook Island, Christmas Atoll
	Aleni Viliami	Atufu Island, Tokelau Islands	Cook Island, Christmas Atoll
	Boni Facio	Babelthuap, Palau Islands	Green Island, Kure Atoll
COMMON NODDY TERN	D. A. Clark	Nauru Island	Birnie Island, Phoenix Islands
	Edwin Huilaui	Si Kaiana Island, Br. Solomon Islands	Sand Island, Johnston Atoll
	P. H. Simpson	Wasu, New Guinea	Sand Island, Johnston Atoll
	Andrew Arnold	At sea, lat. 20°17'N Lon. 174° 49'W	French Frigate Shoals, Leeward Hawaiian Islands



Common Noddies on nest site. (Photo by Roger B. Clapp)

COMMON & HAWAIIAN NODDIES

Both the Common Noddy (or Brown Noddy) and the Black Noddy (White-capped, or Hawaiian Noddy) are common birds of the tropical seas. The Common Noddy, about fifteen inches long, is a dark brown tern with a greyish-white cap and a rounded tail. The Black Noddy is smaller, about thirteen inches long, and at times is difficult to distinguish from the Common Noddy. Under optimum viewing conditions, however, the Black Noddy's darker, almost blackish coloration, whiter cap, and (in some subspecies) grayer tail, enable an experienced observer to tell them apart.

Both species of noddy have harsh, and to some ears, unpleasing calls. The larger species often gives a harsh rasping "karrk" or "gaah" while its smaller relative utters a quieter, higher pitched "kek" or "chrrr".

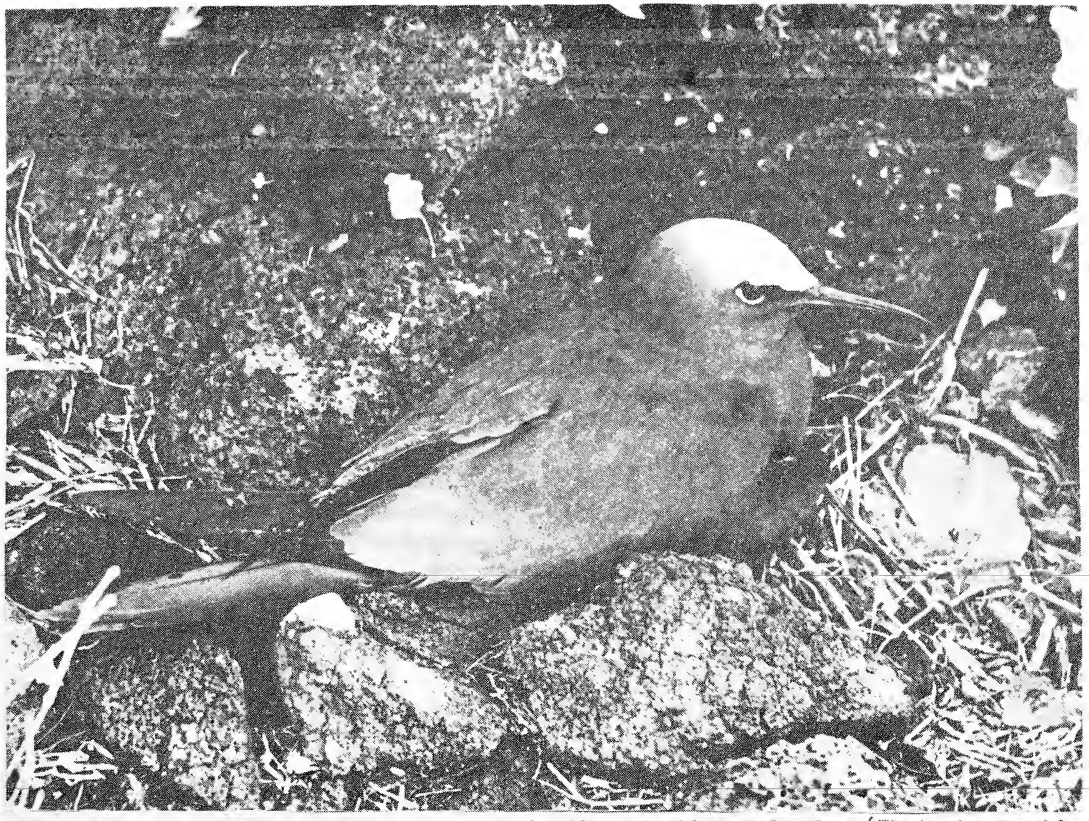
Despite their similarity of appearance the two noddies have quite different nesting habits. On flat treeless islands of the Central Pacific the Common Noddy nests either on the ground or close to it, using no nest materials or building a very sketchy nest with a few leaves of grass or other plant. On islands which support coconuts such as Palmyra Atoll in the Line Islands, they often go to the other extreme and build bulky leaf nests at the base of the palm fronds. The Black Noddies, however, almost always build solid nests composed of leaves, grass, seaweed, or feathers liberally cemented together with their own guano. In addition, they apparently never nest on the ground but prefer to nest on rocky cliffs or in the tops of tall trees. On flat, poorly vegetated islands such as McKean Island in the Phoenix group, very few Black Noddies nest at all, and those that do, utilize whatever affords the nest some elevation.

Both species feed on fish and squid, hovering over the ocean and swooping down to take tidbits off its surface. During these pelagic forays the noddies infrequently alight on the water but will readily perch on any piece of driftwood or other floating debris that may be present. One Common Noddy seen on a POBSP survey chose a most unsavory perch, the floating carcass of a dead shearwater.

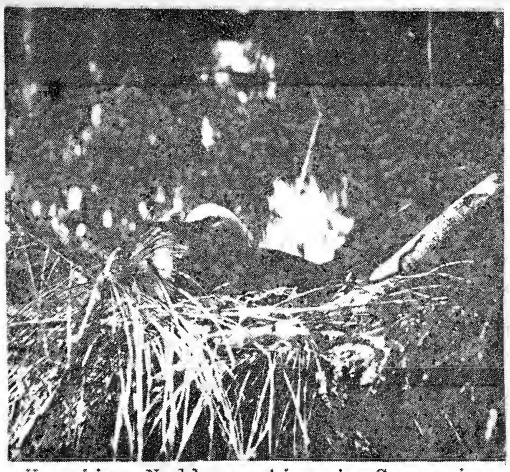
The name "Noddy" which the two species share, is derived from a behavior pattern which frequently occurs when two birds meet one another. The first bird quickly dips its head to show its white cap to the other, who, solemnly in his turn, repeats the greeting. Between birds that are mated this nodding usually ends amicably but if the birds are strangers, a fight often results.

- Roger B. Clapp

The Pacific Bird Observer is a bi-monthly newsletter distributed to collaborators of the Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program of the Smithsonian Institution in order to promote the understanding of birds and their relation to man in the Pacific.



Common Noddy nesting on rocky ground in the Hawaiian Islands. (Photo by David B. Marshall, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)



Hawaiian Noddy nesting in Casuarina tree, Midway I.(A.B.Amerson,Jr. photo)

Common Noddy from Hawaiian Islands (photo by Warren B. King)

PUBLICITY VOLUNTEERS FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW GUINEA AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

In our first issue we published a list of the many volunteers from three quadrants of the Pacific together with their services. By distributing notices, broadcasting information, and passing on copies of the Pacific Bird Observer, they and many like them are greatly assisting the banding program. Listed below are those from the Australian and New Guinea area who have helped to publicize our program. Names of others in the southwest quadrant will be listed in future issues of the Pacific Bird Observer.

AUSTRALIA

Mr. W. B. Hitchcock, Australian Bird Banding Scheme, Canberra City, A. C. T.: published notice in "Fisheries Newsletter" and requested that notices be posted on H.M.A. ships.

Dr. R. Endean, Great Barrier Reef Committee, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane; sent notices to the Heron Island Research Station, the Queensland Museum, and other potential cooperators.

Swire and Yuill Pty. Limited, Sydney; distributed notices to the captains of 23 of their ships.

Mr. A. R. McEvey, National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne; distributed notices to interested observers in that area.

The British Phosphate Commissioners, Collins Street, Melbourne: sent notices to their phosphate ships.

Burns, Philip and Company, Ltd., Sydney, N.S.W.: distributed notices to Masters of their vessels which operate in the Pacific.

Mr. A. Dunbavin Butcher, Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Melbourne: sent press release describing our notice to 280 local radio and TV stations, distributed notices to Fishermen's Cooperatives and shops and editors of five natural history journals in that area.

Director, Government of Western Australia, Department of Fisheries and Fauna, Perth; distributed notices to all branch offices.

Mr. P. A. Gouldrichs, P. and O. Orient Lines of Australia Pty., Sydney: distributed notices to ships of the line.

Mr. R. W. Robson, Publisher, Technipress House, Sydney: published article about our efforts in the "Pacific Island Monthly".

Compagnie de Messageries Maritimes, agence de Sydney, Sydney: distributed twenty copies of our notice in French.

Mr. H. J. Frith, Division of Wildlife Research, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Canberra: published notice in the amateur banders' newsletter.

Mr. G. F. Humphrey, Division of Fisheries and Oceanography, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Canberra; requested publication of notice in "Navy News" and "Fisheries Newsletter".

NEW GUINEA

Mr. C. E. Holland, Raboul Trading Company, Ltd., Rabaul: distributed notices on three lines of ships and sent 250 notices to plantations in that area.

Red-footed Booby nesting in dead Kou tree. (Photo by A.B. Amerson, Jr.)

Blue-Gray Noddy. (Photo by Warren King)

PROJECT SEEKS HELP FROM PACIFIC RESIDENTS

Interested persons living in the Pacific are urged to assist our study of Pacific birds by sending us your personal observations. Although we have scientists stationed in the Pacific, there are many islands, some of which are substantially populated, that are not covered by their studies. Observations made by interested laymen are often just as useful as those made by scientists and will help fill these gaps.

Your letters giving information such as the local breeding and migration schedules for various species, approximate numbers of a migratory species there at any one time, etc., would be especially appreciated. Also useful are interesting photographs from your area, particularly if of a bird which is not commonly found there.

We look forward to publishing appropriate contributions in future issues.

-Editor

Letters to us concerning our program in the Pacific and requests to be put on our free mailing list for the Pacific Bird Observer should be addressed to Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC., 20560.